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UNCLAS VATICAN 000736

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EB/TPP/ABT/BTT (MALAC AND BOBO); EUR/WE (LEVIN)

E.O. 12958 N/A

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SUBJECT: FUNDING REQUEST FOR EMBASSY VATICAN BIOTECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

REF. STATE 15050

1. POST REQUESTS FUNDING OF \$25000 FOR A BIOTECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN ROME AIMED AT FURTHER MOVING THE HOLY SEE TO ADOPT A MORE OPEN AND PUBLIC POSITION IN FAVOR OF BIOTECHNOLOGY. THE TARGET AUDIENCE WILL BE SENIOR VATICAN DECISION MAKERS REPRESENTING A NUMBER OF COUNTRIES, THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE ENCOMPASSING 174 NATIONS, AND THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS CORPS BASED IN ROME AND VATICAN CITY. POPE JOHN PAUL II COULD RECEIVE CONFERENCE DELEGATES IN AUDIENCE, MULTIPLYING THE PUBLIC DIPLOMACY COMPONENT. THE HOLY SEE'S VOICE IS PARTICULARLY INFLUENTIAL AMONG DEVELOPING NATIONS CURRENTLY WARY OF BIOTECHNOLOGY, AND THIS CONFERENCE WILL BE AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT PROMOTING GREATER ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF BIOTECHNOLOGY WITHIN THE DEVELOPING WORLD.

2. THE CONFERENCE WILL SEEK TO PRESENT THE EXPERIENCES OF FARMERS WHO HAVE WORKED WITH BIOTECHNOLOGY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND THE U.S., AND DISCUSS POTENTIAL BIOTECH DEVELOPMENTS THAT COULD SPECIFICALLY PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND END HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION. ALL OF THIS WILL SEEK TO PROVIDE INFORMATION NEEDED TO BOLSTER THE MORAL ARGUMENTS FOR OPENNESS TOWARD THE POSSIBILITIES OF BIOTECHNOLOGY.

3. THIS CONFERENCE IS PART OF POST'S 2006 MPP STRATEGIC GOAL TO PROMOTE GLOBAL HEALTH BY BUILDING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR BIOTECH FOODS THAT CAN HELP MEET TRANSNATIONAL HEALTH THREATS ARISING FROM HUNGER. FOLLOWING CRITICAL COMMENTS ON BIOTECH RELIEF FOOD FROM AN ACTIVIST PRIEST IN ZAMBIA, WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO THAT GOVERNMENT'S 2002 DECISION TO REJECT US FOOD AID, THE EMBASSY HAS ACTIVELY ENGAGED THE HOLY SEE TO PROVIDE CLEARER GUIDANCE TO CATHOLIC CLERGY AND LAY PEOPLE CONCERNING THE SAFETY AND POTENTIAL OF BIOTECH FOODS. WE HAVE PRESSED THE HOLY SEE TO USE ITS MORAL VOICE TO SPEAK OUT ON THIS LIFE AND DEATH ISSUE. AS A RESULT OF THE EMBASSY'S ENGAGEMENT, THE HOLY SEE'S COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE HOSTED A MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND MADE A GENERALLY POSITIVE ASSESSMENT, WHICH GENERATED EXTENSIVE POSITIVE INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE AND HAS POSITIONED THE HOLY SEE TO SPEAK OUT MORE FORCEFULLY ON THE ISSUE. IN THE YEAR AHEAD, WE INTEND TO CONTINUE OUR PRESSURE ON THE HOLY SEE TO SPEAK OUT IN FAVOR OF BIOTECH FOODS AND TO DISSEMINATE THEIR CONCLUSIONS MORE WIDELY AS GUIDANCE TO BISHOPS AND Nuncios. THIS BIOTECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE IS A MAJOR ELEMENT OF THAT STRATEGY.

4. THE COST ESTIMATE COVERS TRANSPORTATION AND PER DIEM FOR SPEAKERS, SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION SERVICES, VENUE HIRE, PRINTING COSTS, CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS COLLATION AND MAILING, AND MEDIA KITS.

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